

**Celebrating  
12 Decades  
of the British  
Academy**

**120**

**BA** The  
British  
Academy

**120** CELEBRATING  
12 DECADES



# Foreword



**Professor Julia Black**

*President of the British Academy*

**T**he British Academy was established by Royal Charter in 1902. To mark our 120th anniversary in 2022, we are looking back at each of the 12 decades in our history to explore how the Academy has developed as the UK authority for the humanities and social sciences.

In this commemorative booklet, for each decade we provide a brief narrative overview, and then focus on one particular aspect of the British Academy that can be associated with that decade.

We look at our origins and our early years of patient evolution. We identify the key characters whose vision and energies have helped shape the Academy's identity and roles.

And, while the last couple of years have been a period of extreme upheaval, we will see that there have been major disruptions in the past that have affected the Academy's development even more acutely.

We also demonstrate the important contributions that continue to be made by the 'SHAPE' disciplines we support – Social Sciences, Humanities and the Arts for People and the Economy.

We hope you enjoy coming on our retrospective journey, and at the same time gain a clearer understanding of our future direction.



# The 1900s

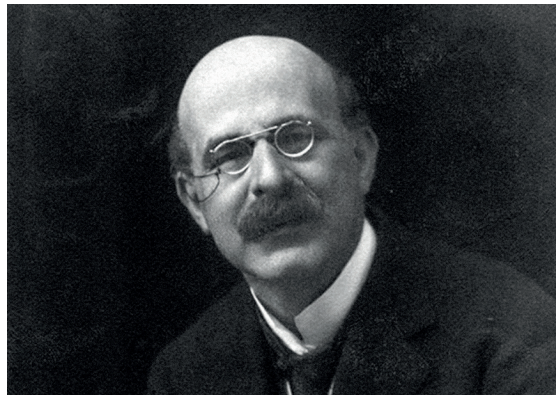
As moves were made in 1899 to found an International Association of Academies, it was realised that, while Britain was appropriately represented in 'Natural Science' by the Royal Society, there was no British academy that could represent 'Literary Science' – what we now call Humanities and Social Sciences. The Royal Society set up a 'British Academy Committee' to consider the question, but eventually decided not to take matters further itself. In summer and autumn 1901, various distinguished scholars met in order to take independent action. The 'proposed Fellows of the British Academy' met for the first time as such on 17 December 1901. The Academy received its Charter of Incorporation from Edward VII on 8 August 1902, the eve of his coronation.

Though the British Academy now existed, it had no home or money. Somewhat fortuitously, as well as senior academics, the 49 founding Fellows listed in the Charter included Mr Arthur Balfour MP – and he had just become Prime Minister in July 1902. It was therefore with some hope that the Academy submitted to the Treasury a case for 'assistance from public funds', including an ambitious list of 28 major academic 'enterprises' that it wished to undertake. However, although Balfour was sympathetic, the Treasury was not forthcoming.

To remedy this lack of resources, the Academy's indefatigable Secretary, Israel Gollancz, strove to promote wider awareness of the new body and to secure private endowments – initially from a close circle of *émigré* Jewish friends. He achieved a major coup when Miss Constance Schweich donated the then very handsome sum of £10,000 to support research into 'Ancient Civilisation with reference to Biblical Study'. One product of this fund would be the Schweich Lectures series, in which a distinguished scholar would give a course of three public lectures – the first, in 1908, were delivered by S.R. Driver on 'Modern Research as illustrating the Bible', to 'a large and representative audience'. Indeed, these instantly established themselves as significant events, with 'at least a thousand' attending the 1910 Schweich Lectures.

An even better opportunity for bringing the Academy into the public eye was presented by the 300th anniversary of the birth of John Milton in 1908, and Gollancz seized it. Taking the lead in discharging what was seen as a national duty to honour one of the greatest names in English literature, the Academy organised a series of celebratory events at different venues over several days, which included formal addresses and recitals, scholarly lectures, a church service, a theatrical performance, and a banquet hosted by the Lord Mayor of London.

This undertaking greatly increased the Academy's prestige, but it led to more material benefits too. Mrs Frida Mond, widow of a wealthy industrial chemist, and aunt of Constance Schweich, was so impressed by 'the effective and dignified manner in which the Milton Tercentenary Commemoration was organized and carried out', that she donated (and later bequeathed) sums to establish a fund to support research and lectures in English literature. And her close friend, Henriette Hertz (whose niece Gollancz married in 1910), would also bequeath money to support lectures in philosophy and art history. Several decades before the first female Fellow was elected to the Academy, the generosity of these women is all the more notable.



Top Left: The British Academy's seal was designed in 1906–07. It depicts Clio, the Muse of History.

Left: Israel Gollancz, Secretary of the British Academy 1902–1930.

## FEATURE

# Private Endowments and Fundraising



## Professor Sally Shuttleworth

*Treasurer of the British Academy, reflects on the continuing importance for the Academy of private endowments and fundraising*

The British Academy did not receive regular financial support from public funds until 1924, so in its earliest years it was heavily reliant on the generous benefactions of private individuals. These gifts, from a group of women who valued research and scholarship for its inherent worth, established many of the Academy's early events and prizes. A number of these initiatives continue to this day to provide recognition for high achievement and opportunities for scholars to share their work with a public audience.

The British Academy continues to benefit from public funding, but the importance of private giving is as important now as it was in the fragile early years. Charitable bodies such as the Wolfson Foundation and Leverhulme Trust have been generous supporters and valuable partners for over half a century. These relationships have enabled the Academy to respond creatively to the needs of the research community and our disciplines, independent of the government.

One of the most striking examples of the importance of private support came in 2011, when the Leverhulme Trust stepped in to save the Academy's Small Research Grants programme. Considered too labour intensive for the modest size of the awards by our government funders, these grants provide invaluable seed corn funding for innovative ideas and have often paved the way for major,

influential research projects. The Leverhulme Trust provided funding at a crucial moment, enabling the British Academy to maintain this vital source of support. It remains our most popular funding programme, with over 1000 applicants per year.

More recently, the Wolfson Foundation has pledged £10 million to the Academy for a mixture of capital and programme funding. It is the largest donation the Academy has ever received and will transform both the physical home of the Academy and the support that we can offer to the research community. One part of this is the Early-Career Researcher Network, which launched in autumn 2021 and is the first of its kind in the UK. The network gives crucial support to early career scholars from all backgrounds, affiliations, and locations who work in the humanities and social sciences. This investment will support a healthy and thriving research community and help to create our subjects' future leaders.

Frida Mond, her niece Constance Schweich, and her good friend Henriette Hertz all generously supported the fledgling British Academy with endowments.





# The 1910s

In the early years of this decade, the British Academy was increasingly assuming its proper role as a national academy. It successfully hosted the International Historical Congress in 1913. The first volume in its major publishing series *Records of the Social and Economic History of England and Wales* – embarked upon as ‘a great national undertaking’ and now supported by a grant of £400 a year from the Treasury – appeared in 1914. And in that same year it initiated planning for a national (indeed, international) commemoration of the 300th anniversary of Shakespeare’s death to be held in 1916.

And then war engulfed Europe. The Treasury grant for the *Records* series was cancelled; so too were the Shakespeare celebrations. The grim realities of the conflict were brought home when the Academy was asked to help restore the great ancient library of Louvain which had been destroyed by fire early in the hostilities. And there were individual tragedies: the Revd J.H. Moulton would die on way his way back from India to deliver the Academy’s Schweich Lectures, when his ship was torpedoed in the Mediterranean. A more trivial impact would be the disruption caused to the Academy’s first attempt at holding a dinner for Fellows in October 1917, with attendance reduced because of the fear of nightly air raids on London.

A significant quandary that arose from the war was how relations should be maintained with scholars in enemy countries. When Canon William Sanday presented a paper to the Academy in May 1918 advocating some rapprochement with leading German academics, it provoked public criticism for being premature. The British Academy’s official stance throughout was measured: it did not expel its German and Austrian ‘Corresponding Fellows’. And in the aftermath of the war, although it bowed to a French initiative in 1919 to establish a new Union Académique Internationale (to replace the now defunct International Association of Academies), the Academy stressed: ‘We look forward to a time, and we hope it may not be a distant time, when all those who are concerned in the pursuit of human studies whatever their nationality, will be able to work in concord and mutual respect.’

Although the war had disrupted the Academy’s development as an institution, the closing stages of the conflict presented an opportunity for it to focus on a particular area of interest. As some of the most important archaeological sites in the Middle East fell into the British sphere of influence, the Academy’s President, Frederic Kenyon (who was also Director of the British Museum), was eager that the Academy should take a leading role in placing on a more secure footing what he called ‘the Organization of Archaeology’. And in 1918-19, the Academy helped initiate the establishment of a British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem.

Kenyon’s predecessor as President, James Bryce, had delivered – in his address to the 1917 AGM – an astonishing personal survey of what he thought would be the scholarly trends across all the Academy’s disciplinary interests during ‘The Next Thirty Years’. But learning was rapidly becoming fragmented into specialisms, and this was recognised in 1919 when the four ‘Section’ subject groupings into which the Fellows of the British Academy had originally been sorted were reorganised into nine Sections, creating a structural skeleton that would evolve gradually over succeeding decades.



Top Left: Frederic Kenyon, President 1917-21 and Secretary 1930-49, promoted the British Academy’s longstanding special interest in archaeology.

Left: The 1913 International Historical Congress, organised by the British Academy in collaboration with the Royal Historical Society.

## FEATURE

# British International Research Institutes



## Professor Charles Tripp

*the British Academy's Vice-President for the British International Research Institutes, discusses the important role of these institutions*

In 1918, the British Academy set up an organising committee to pursue the idea of a British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem. By 1950, there were five 'British Schools and Institutes' conducting research in the Mediterranean and the Middle East. They included two – the British School at Athens and the British School at Rome – that had been founded before the British Academy itself. It was at this point, however, that the Academy formally became the channel through which they received government funds, crucially supplementing the private endowments of the long-established organisations and providing financial security for the newer ones.

There are now eight 'British International Research Institutes' (BIRI) – research hubs forming a network of regional contacts and activities that covers the Mediterranean, the Black Sea and southern Europe, Africa, Turkey, the Middle East, Iran and Central Asia. These independent organisations conduct research, collaborate with overseas and UK-based partners, run programmes of events and publications, and provide facilities, training and logistical support to visiting researchers. There is a particular focus on supporting the next generation of scholars and pioneering scholarship.

The BIRI have been a driving force for excellence in arts, humanities and social sciences research around the world for more than a century. They are renowned centres for the study of archaeology and have contributed to some of the most important discoveries about

the history of humanity. Many current projects are focused on the management of cultural heritage and the role that the past plays in contemporary social and economic development.

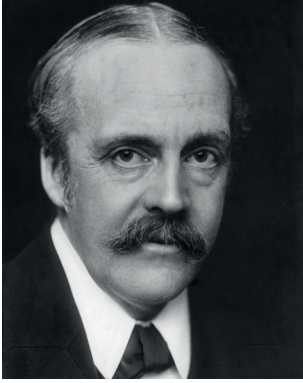
They also manage projects that relate to the urgent and evolving priorities of the 21st century, including climate change, migration, and the organisation of water resources. For example, the 'BIRI Sustainable Water Management Initiative' is developing a multidisciplinary, inter-regional approach to sustainable water-management, which draws on rich local knowledge and historical experience.

During the pandemic, many of the BIRI have made good use of this difficult time to improve their buildings, refurbish their libraries and public spaces, and renew the facilities that they can offer to visiting scholars. Several have also forged ahead with digitising their rich historical archives for the benefit of UK-based and international research communities.

The British Academy is proud to be a longstanding supporter and major funder of these independent organisations, ensuring the long-term future of this vital network.

In 1998, the British School in Jerusalem merged with the British Institute at Amman to create the Council for British Research in the Levant. The School in Jerusalem was renamed the Kenyon Institute, after the renowned archaeologist Dame Kathleen Kenyon FBA (daughter of Sir Frederic Kenyon FBA).





Although the war was over, one final casualty of it would be inflicted by the internal affairs of the British Academy. The young economist John Maynard Keynes had been nominated for membership of the Academy's newly constituted 'Economic Science' Section, but his election was blocked at the 1920 Annual General Meeting. Keynes' recent very popular book on the *Economic Consequences of the Peace*, which had denounced the punitive financial terms that had been imposed on Germany, was thought by several Fellows to be politically offensive. This error of judgement on the part of the Academy was not put right until Keynes was finally elected to the Fellowship in 1929.

But peace did allow the Academy to start once more to develop its academic programmes. In 1921 it marked the 600th anniversary of the death of Dante with lectures and a publication. It received the proceeds of a fund to establish a lecture on 'a Welsh or other Celtic theme' in the name of the late Sir John Rhys FBA. It engaged with the international projects being promoted by the Union Académique Internationale, including one to catalogue all ancient Greek pottery. And, after Toyko Imperial University's library had been destroyed in an earthquake in 1923, it was to the Academy that the British government turned to co-ordinate Britain's efforts to help restore the library.

Indeed, the Academy's relations with government were much aided by the fact that its President was now Arthur Balfour. Although he had been unable to secure public funding for the Academy when he had been Prime Minister, he now lobbied vigorously on its behalf. This bore fruit when the short-lived Labour government of 1924 gave the Academy a grant of £2000 'in aid of the work, national and international, conducted by the British Academy – the whole sum to be devoted to the promotion and publication of research'; the fact that one its Fellows, Richard Haldane, was that administration's Lord Chancellor had clearly been influential. And the annual grant was continued by the new Conservative Chancellor of the Exchequer, Winston Churchill.

With this secure source of funding, the Academy was now better able to support its research interests. And additional generous private funding enabled the Academy to commission important excavations in the Hippodrome of Constantinople, carried out in 1927 and 1928.

In 1927, the Academy celebrated its 25th anniversary. The celebratory dinner was made an even happier occasion by a letter from Churchill announcing that, 'in recognition of the position of the British Academy and its services to the nation', it had been granted 'free quarters' in the east wing of Burlington Gardens. The Academy's first home was officially opened in July 1928, in the presence of the Archbishop of Canterbury and also of Sir Charles Wakefield, who had generously paid for the refurbishment of the rooms. It was followed by a lunch attended by the Prince of Wales.

That the Academy ended the decade so positively was a fitting culmination of the ceaseless efforts of its first Secretary, Israel Gollancz, to see it established on a sound footing. He died in 1930.

# The 1920s



Top Left: Arthur Balfour, who had been Prime Minister 1902-05, was President of the British Academy 1921-28.

Left: The benefactor Sir Charles Wakefield, the architect Arnold Mitchell, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and the Lord Mayor of London, in the wood-panelled Council Room at the opening of the British Academy's rooms in Burlington Gardens in July 1928.



## FEATURE

# The home of the British Academy



For the first 26 years of its existence, the Academy relied on the generosity of other learned societies for accommodation and hired rooms. In 1928, it acquired its first home, at 6 Burlington Gardens. The Academy has moved three times since then, as it has grown in size and ambition. In 1968, it moved into rooms in Burlington House, and then again in 1982 to 20-21 Cornwall Terrace, which overlooks Regent's Park.

The British Academy has occupied its present home, 10-11 Carlton House Terrace, since 1998. The Terrace was built in 1831 to designs by John Nash. For the first 90 odd years, Nos. 10 and 11 were grand private houses – William Gladstone lived at No. 11 when he was Prime Minister for the first time. The two houses became joined together when they were occupied by the Union Club from the 1920s and then by the Commonwealth Secretariat.

In 2018, with support from its sponsoring government department, BEIS, the British Academy extended its lease on its home at Carlton House Terrace to 125 years. Now, with just over 120 years remaining, we are looking ahead to the next 12 decades. While staff were working from home during the pandemic, the offices on the upper floors were refurbished to create inviting workspaces with lots of natural light. And now we have embarked on an expansion project, opening

up areas in the basement levels, which will provide much-needed modern, digitally-enabled event spaces. This ambitious programme has been generously supported by the Wolfson Foundation, the Garfield Weston Foundation, and others. The innovative facilities will provide opportunities for us to reach out to the research community and other audiences, both nationally and internationally, including through hybrid events and broadcast-quality streaming.

Our beautiful home at Carlton House Terrace, with its historic interiors, also generates valuable funds for the British Academy through the use of this distinctive venue by other clients for meetings, events, weddings and location filming – run through our trading arm, Clio Enterprises (named after the Muse of history, Clio, who appears on the Academy's seal). The project now being undertaken to transform the lower levels will diversify the audiences we can welcome into the building and deliver important additional commercial opportunities, thereby continuing to strengthen the financial independence of the Academy.

Although the work of the British Academy reaches across the nation and beyond, its London home is being fitted out as a resource to support the humanities and social sciences for the next 120 years.

Top Right: A development project in 2022-23 will open up new digitally-enabled event spaces.



# The 1930s

Having acquired its first home in 1928, the British Academy focused on kitting it out. An ornate wooden chair, made for the Pre-Raphaelite artist William Holman Hunt by William Morris, was presented by the artist's widow 'as my tribute to the Instruction and Delight I have derived from the British Academy'; until very recently it was used as the President's chair at Council meetings. A telephone was installed, and the Academy formally engaged Miss Doris Pearson, its first full-time member of staff, as 'Assistant Secretary'.

There was more overdue catching-up to do. The question of whether women could be elected to the Fellowship had been raised in 1920. But it was not until 1931 that the sociologist and social reformer Mrs Beatrice Webb was elected a Fellow – nominated by John Maynard Keynes – and even then, this didn't immediately open the floodgates for more women to join.

Throughout the decade the British Academy would grumble about 'inadequate' funds for supporting 'learned enterprises': the annual grant from the government had not increased since it began in 1924 – indeed between 1932 and 1935, during the Great Depression, it was actually cut by 10%, to £1800. Nevertheless, the Academy had embarked on a number of long-term research endeavours to publish source materials for scholars, and these started to bear fruit. A project to catalogue all the ancient Greek coins held in British collections delivered its first publications. And an ambitious plan for a comprehensive dictionary of the Latin used in medieval Britain, an idea first floated in a letter to *The Times* in 1913, published an interim *Medieval Latin Word-List* – which, revised and reissued many times, would be an invaluable handbook until the full dictionary was completed in 2013. The Academy also supported innovative work by individual Fellows: in 1938-39, the 75-year-old Aurel Stein borrowed an RAF biplane to conduct an aerial survey of the Roman Empire's frontier in Iraq and Jordan, producing a photographic resource still of great value today.

But a dominant concern of the Academy during this decade was the threat to scholarship in Europe, particularly in Nazi Germany. In his 1934 Presidential Address, J.W. Mackail warned that 'the Commonwealth of Learning' was menaced by 'the establishment of a prison of the mind in countries which were once centres of humanism', and the Academy's duty lay in 'the clear, emphatic, uncompromising and constant upholding' of the ideals of humanism. Invitations to celebratory events at German universities were turned down, because acceptance would be 'embarrassing'. Individual Fellows served on the Academic Assistance Council and its successor, the Society for the Protection of Science and Learning, which helped resettle refugee academics. The Academy would end up as a beneficiary of these traumatic circumstances, in that many Jewish refugees would become eminent scholars in the UK and would be elected as Fellows of the Academy. The Academy also expressed its dismay at the plunder and destruction of cultural monuments during the Spanish Civil War.

In May 1939 the Academy hosted the annual meeting of the Union Académique Internationale. While the four-day occasion was a great success, it was overshadowed by troubles elsewhere, with the Polish delegates unable to attend because of 'the disturbed political situation'. And three months later, the Academy's representatives at the International Congress of Archaeology in Berlin felt obliged to leave early – just days before the outbreak of war.



Top Left: The 'President's chair' was donated to the British Academy by the widow of the artist William Holman Hunt in 1930.

Left: Aurel Stein (centre) and crew in front of the Vickers Vincent biplane from which he conducted an aerial survey of the Roman Empire's eastern frontier.

## FEATURE

# Women in the British Academy



## Anne Phillips

*Graham Wallas Professor of Political Science at the London School of Economics, discusses the first woman to be elected a Fellow of the British Academy, and those who have followed her*

According to her British Academy obituary, Beatrice Webb's 'contribution to the worlds of thought and of affairs remain of permanent importance.' Though 'she modestly described herself as a social investigator', she was 'at once student and reformer, historian, economist, and pamphleteer, an experienced observer of politics and the joint author of books which opened a new chapter in English sociology'. Just one achievement among many was her role in helping to found the London School of Economics and Political Science in 1895; and I am privileged to have Beatrice's desk in my office at LSE.

Though the Academy regarded her highly, Beatrice Webb was not quite sure what she was joining when she was elected as its first female Fellow in 1931. After attending her first meeting, she described it in her diary as 'a funny little body of elderly and aged men'. And sadly that is how she would have continued to know it, because no other woman was elected in her lifetime – she died in 1943, and the archaeologist Gertrude Caton-Thompson did not become the second female Fellow until 1944. Thereafter there was a more regular flow, so that by the early 1960s some 20 women had been elected as Fellows.

At the time of my own election in 2003, women still made up only 12% of the Fellowship. And the British Academy was sufficiently off my own radar that I didn't know much about it when I got the letter inviting me to join. I found some aspects relatively unchanged from Beatrice Webb's

time, but there was also work of a more inspiring kind, distributing grants and research fellowships to early and mid-career scholars.

A lot has changed since then. In the last 10 years, women have made up 45% of those elected (which has brought the current proportion of women in the Fellowship up to 28%). And women are now at the heart of the British Academy's life and governance. The Academy's current President, Professor Julia Black, is the second woman to hold that leadership position.

The sociologist Beatrice Webb was the first woman elected to be a Fellow of the British Academy, in 1931. Photograph by G. Bernard Shaw.



# The 1940s

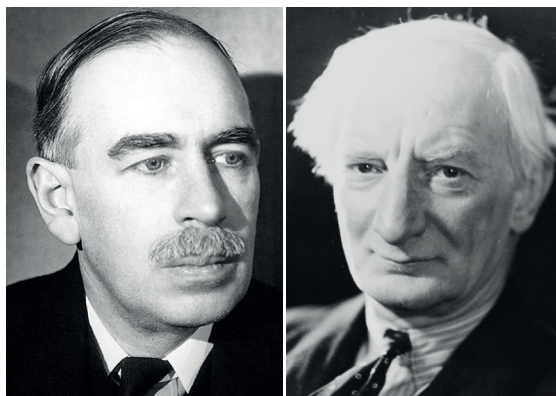
This decade did not start well for the British Academy. In September 1940 bomb blasts twice caused ‘injury’ to the Academy’s premises in Burlington Gardens, rendering the Council Room ‘unfit for use’. Worse, the Academy had been informed that the annual grant it received from government was to be discontinued for the duration of the war. Nevertheless the Academy responded to a Home Office request to consider the cases of academics who had been interned as ‘enemy aliens’ and to identify those with valuable qualifications: on the recommendation of the Academy’s tribunal, most would be released from internment – including Nikolaus Pevsner, future author of the famous *Buildings of England* series, who would become a Fellow of the British Academy in 1965.

In 1941 the Treasury partially restored the Academy’s funding, stipulating that a particular focus of the annual £1000 grant should be ‘the preservation of learned societies whose continued existence would otherwise be endangered by the war’. Even so, the activities of the Academy were inevitably much disrupted, and it was often limited to issuing expressions of concern and sympathy for the plight of academic individuals and institutions caught up in the conflict across the world.

If the British Academy itself was constrained in what it could do at this time, individual Fellows stepped up to play roles of great national significance – demonstrating the value of the disciplines promoted by the Academy. In 1942 the economist William Beveridge published his report on *Social Insurance and Allied Services*; seeking to overcome the five evil ‘Giants’ of want, disease, ignorance, squalor and idleness, it laid the foundations for the postwar development of the Welfare State. And the economist J.M. Keynes was one of the main architects of the new international monetary system devised at the 1944 Bretton Woods Conference, which sought to avoid the mistakes of the Great Depression and to boost postwar recovery.

We may also note in passing that many men and women who were already, or would become, humanities academics helped bring about victory through their work in military intelligence, particularly at the codebreaking centre at Bletchley Park: over 60 would go on to be elected as Fellows of the British Academy for their academic excellence.

Peace brought a modest increase in government funding, and opened up channels of scholarly communication once more. In 1947 Harold Idris Bell, the President of the British Academy, undertook a visit to Germany in order to assess the state of scholarship there in the aftermath of the war. But the overall impression was that the Academy was now stagnating: as Bell admitted in his 1948 Presidential Address, ‘it has even been unkindly suggested that the main official function of Fellows is to write obituary notices of one another’. In what was later exaggeratingly described as a ‘palace revolution’, in 1949 the 86-year-old Secretary, Frederic Kenyon, stepped aside after 19 years in office. His replacement, Mortimer Wheeler, arrived with a clear agenda to breathe new life into the Academy.



Left: The economists William Beveridge and John Maynard Keynes, both Fellows of the British Academy, demonstrated the contribution that academics can make to public policy at the very highest level.

## FEATURE

# The British Academy's Public Policy work



## Professor Christina Boswell

*the British Academy's Vice-President for Public Policy, explains how the Academy's contribution to contemporary policy issues is more important than ever*

As the country begins to think about how we recover from the Covid-19 pandemic, one can't help but draw parallels with the situation of Beveridge and Keynes in their attempts to envisage a safer and more prosperous future beyond the ravages of war.

As then, individual Fellows have played their roles in steering the country through troubled times, and though our war has been with microscopic enemies rather than sovereign nations, it has required no less understanding of economics, politics, culture and diplomacy. Individual Fellows have provided potentially life-saving advice and insight on the effectiveness of lockdown measures such as mask wearing and social distancing, in modelling the geographical and demographic trends affecting morbidity and mortality, in communicating scientific information and risk to the public, and in responding to disinformation and hesitancy on vaccines.

But unlike the 1940s, today's British Academy can play a much more active role in marshalling the knowledge and insights of our Fellows to shape public policy debates and guide policymaking. The multidisciplinary insights in the Academy's *COVID Decade* reports have provided the UK with both an understanding of the long-term impact of Covid-19 on society, and a roadmap for recovery after the pandemic. The reports starkly reveal how, despite the great achievements since the Beveridge Report, we continue to face its five evil 'Giants', all of which can be exacerbated in

times of crisis.

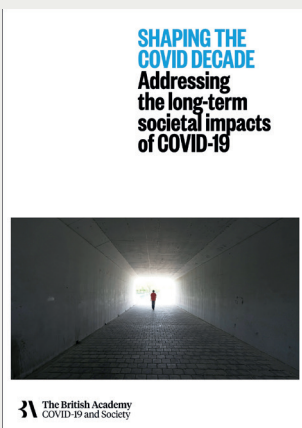
The Academy's policy work now seeks to build on these landmark reports by digging deeper into the key challenges and opportunities of the post-pandemic recovery. We will be interrogating the mechanics of policymaking itself, to understand how we might make our democratic system more resilient to crises we face in the future, whatever they may be.

Our programmes on social infrastructure will help us to understand better the vital role of services and structures that support the quality of life in communities, as well as the social and cultural 'glue' that ties them together in a post-welfare society.

Lockdowns have accelerated the rollout of digital technologies, but this has only highlighted inequalities in digital access and use. The Academy asks 'what does a good digital society look like?', and seeks insights from across the SHAPE disciplines to help answer it.

Finally, the British Academy is championing the role of SHAPE in responding to the climate emergency, examining how we can foster shared understandings and collective action to bring about the changes that are urgently needed, and to explore what kinds of places and communities we will live in next.

The COVID Decade reports have provided an understanding of the long-term impact of Covid-19 on society, and a roadmap for recovery after the pandemic.





# The 1950s

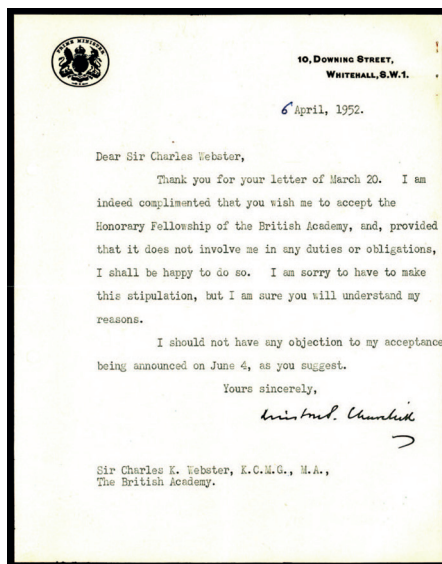
The British Academy's new Secretary, Mortimer Wheeler, was determined to improve its administration, its finances, and its role in supporting research. In 1950, the Treasury accepted with some relief the suggestion that the Academy should step in to become the channel through which the British international research 'Schools and Institutes' received government funds.

A further opportunity to raise the profile of the British Academy was presented by the celebration of its 50th anniversary in 1952. The Academy's Council was excited by 'the possibility of utilizing the occasion for the introduction of a new and outstanding distinguished Honorary Fellow'. The person they had in mind was the Prime Minister, Winston Churchill. In fact there had already been two unsuccessful attempts to elect Churchill as an 'Ordinary' Fellow, for his scholarly work as a writer of history – first in 1938, when the Academy's Council decided not to recommend him for election, and then in 1939 (after Council had been urged to re-think), when it was Churchill's turn to say no, regretting that 'in the present circumstances' he would be 'too fully occupied' to be able to accept. Council's hopes that the Prime Minister would now adorn its golden jubilee dinner were frustrated when Churchill said that 'the pressure of my public duties' prevented him from attending, but he did accept the Honorary Fellowship.

Wheeler sought to refresh the British Academy's programmes of events and publications. New endowments added new lecture series, in archaeology, poetry, and law. Monographs published included a field survey of *Offa's Dyke* and a definitive study of *Corregio's Drawings*. And new long-term publishing series were embarked upon, including one to catalogue the early coinage of Britain and Ireland.

But it was in this decade that the British Academy took a significant step forward as a funder of research. In 1954 the Pilgrim Trust approached the Academy about the possibility of establishing a fund from which grants could be paid to scholars 'in the field of the Humanities and the Arts'. As a pilot to test the viability of such a funding scheme, the Trust gave the Academy £2000 a year for three years for the purpose of 'helping individual scholars to carry to a conclusion work of high value to scholarship which otherwise could never be concluded or might not be concluded for a long time'. At the end of the trial, the Academy was able to report that 41 academics, early career researchers as well as more senior scholars, had been supported, and the Pilgrim Trust responded by renewing its funding for another three years.

These grants had been modest, but they had indicated the need for – and the value of – such research funding. To prove the point to government, in 1958 the British Academy secured £6000 from the Rockefeller Foundation to conduct a systematic review of the provision for research in the humanities and social sciences in the UK.



Top Left: Mortimer Wheeler, Secretary 1949-68, did much to restore the fortunes of the British Academy.

Left: Letter from the Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, accepting the Honorary Fellowship of the British Academy in 1952. (The letter's black border marks the death of the King earlier that year.)

## FEATURE

# Art at the British Academy



## Professor Dawn Adès

*Chair of the British Academy's Art Committee, discusses the works of art that adorn the Academy's home in Carlton House Terrace*

Winston Churchill was elected an Honorary Fellow of the British Academy in 1952. He is included in a group portrait of eight of the Academy's Honorary Fellows, which has been commissioned by the Academy from the Scottish artist Calum Colvin RSA. The work is being created in Calum's signature style of 'constructed photography' – that is, assembled tableaux of objects, which are then painted and photographed. Other Fellows portrayed will include the philosophers Bertrand Russell and Mary Warnock, the artist Henry Moore, and Baroness Brenda Hale, the former President of the Supreme Court. This will be the latest addition to the British Academy's collection of art.

When the British Academy moved to Carlton House Terrace in 1998, it was clear that the small art collection it brought with it from its previous premises was not going to be adequate to the task of filling the walls of the large rooms of its new home. The Art Committee was formed to address this. The collection it has put together now contains over a hundred works, ranging in date from the early 18th century to the present, and across a variety of media, including figurative and non-figurative paintings, prints, photography, textiles and ceramics. Works are acquired through purchases, commissions, donations and bequests, and loans further enhance the collection.

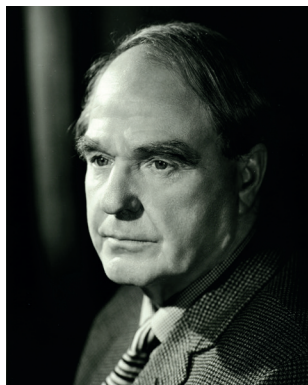
There are pieces that are in keeping with the period and style of the building, including a large portrait (on loan from the National

Portrait Gallery) of Edward VII who granted the British Academy its Royal Charter in 1902. But there is a particular focus on works by leading modern and contemporary British artists. A highlight is the significant collection of works from well-known artists of the St Ives School, including Barbara Hepworth, Terry Frost, Roger Hilton and Wilhemina Barns Graham; these have largely come from the generous bequest by the sociologist Ray Pahl FBA, who was a keen collector.

Commissions have also been possible thanks to fundraising campaigns. A jewel in the crown has been Patrick Hughes's intriguing *A Study of the Studiolo*. And in the run up to its centenary in 2002, the British Academy commissioned two other group portraits – of its living Presidents (by Stuart Pearson Wright), and of all its female Vice-Presidents (by John Goto).

This depiction of Winston Churchill will form part of a group portrait of eight Honorary Fellows of the British Academy, commissioned from the artist Calum Colvin.





# The 1960s

In 1961, the Rockefeller Report on how to improve the provision for *Research in the Humanities and the Social Sciences* was published. This survey commissioned by the British Academy had included visits to the United States, Canada, France, Germany and Holland to gather comparative information from foreign grant-giving bodies. The report concluded: 'We should therefore like to see established a Council for Research in the Humanities and the Social Sciences.' The Academy's Secretary, Mortimer Wheeler, presented this case to the Treasury. He was told that government already had long-term plans in respect of the social sciences – a Social Science Research Council would finally be established in 1965. But, for the funding of research in the humanities, the Treasury argued that a new body would not be necessary 'since the work could be done equally well by the British Academy itself with considerably less expense in overheads'.

At the 1962 Annual General Meeting, the President was able to report that the British Academy had been given £25,000 of public money a year to disburse as research grants in the humanities, with a promise that this sum would soon increase (by 1969 the figure had risen to £65,000). The first grants were awarded in May 1963, for 44 projects, totalling £20,735. The bald project titles – all that now survives from once detailed project proposals – are both tantalisingly vague and intriguingly exotic (e.g. *Ethnography in New Guinea* £300; *Kurdish-English Dictionary* £750; *British Bronze Age* £325; *Ethical concept of sin* £350; *Computer tests in Greek textual criticism* £365). These grants of smaller amounts of money have remained the British Academy's most popular research funding scheme: a review in 2000 concluded that 'small grants are important out of all proportion to their size in fostering original research'.

Although public funding for research was now on a much firmer footing, private funding remained important too. In 1965 the British Academy received the generous proceeds, amounting to over £90,000, of a 'Thank-You Britain' Fund raised by Jewish refugees who had sought shelter in this country from the Nazis: this fund continues to support senior research fellowships. And in 1968 Gertrude Caton-Thompson (who had been the second woman to be elected a Fellow of the British Academy) gave the Academy an endowment of £21,000 to support archaeological research.

More long-term research endeavours aimed at publishing historical and cultural source material were initiated, including one that would promote the great musical heritage of Thomas Tallis and his contemporaries by producing editions of *Early English Church Music*. But, although much of the focus of this decade was on the humanities, the British Academy recognised the increasing importance of the social science disciplines by creating a new 'Section' of its Fellowship to cover Social and Political Studies in 1965.

At the end of 1968, the British Academy moved from its rooms in 6 Burlington Gardens to a new, more dignified, home in Burlington House, where it shared the courtyard with a number of other distinguished learned societies. At the same time, Wheeler retired as Secretary, having achieved much of the transformation of the British Academy's fortunes that he had aimed for when he took on the role in 1949.



Top Left: The sculptor Henry Moore was honoured by election to the Fellowship of the British Academy in 1966.

Left: In 1968, the British Academy moved into a new home in Burlington House.



## FEATURE

# British Academy Small Research Grants



## Anne Haour

*Professor in the Arts and Archaeology of Africa at the University of East Anglia, who was elected to be a Fellow of the British Academy in 2021, discusses the significance of receiving Small Research Grant funding from the Academy*

I received two British Academy Small Research Grants for archaeological fieldwork carried out in 2003 and 2004 in two study areas, 800 km apart, in Niger, in collaboration with colleagues from that country's Institut de Recherches en Sciences Humaines. The awards came just after I had received my doctorate, and helped prepare me for a career that has much depended on field research: I have carried out larger projects since then, but in many ways these grants helped shape what came next.

My study on the archaeological landscape of the Makarauci Valley involved one of the historical heartlands of the medieval Hausa polities. I was returning to the area where I'd undertaken my doctoral research, but this time with a bigger team and budget, and I was now the project leader of a team in which I was the sole female. In a small village, without electricity at the time, we had to learn patience and endurance. In a promising site we expected to find artefacts and features indicative of past human activity, but at first many of our trenches revealed nothing. We all were tetchy at times, with some team members asking why we were wasting our time digging latrines! It was fine in the end, with some good results from the project – an indication of local pottery sequences, stone-by-stone recording of a large enclosure, and some fascinating oral traditions.

My project in the Mékrou Valley documented the archaeology of an area of southwestern Niger where there had been evidence

spanning Palaeolithic to submodern times, and was run in collaboration with a colleague expert in Palaeolithic. The area is in a nature reserve, so we weren't allowed to excavate; we could only conduct a surface survey and clean the features and artefacts that had been exposed by natural processes. The landscape is much eroded by seasonal rainfall, which releases huge amounts of buried archaeological material – making the survey challenging. But we learned a huge amount about the long-term settlement of the area. And the field skills and strategy that I developed served me extremely well a few years later when I worked in similar circumstances just across the border, in Benin, with a large European Research Council award.

The links I forged with colleagues in Niger endure to this day; we are all pretty senior folk now, but one never forgets the experience of sharing manioc and sardines under a tree.

Though they were only for small amounts (a fact that one US-based referee commented on with bemusement!), for me these two Small Research Grants punched well above their weight, playing a fundamental role in my career.

Archaeological survey in the Mékrou Valley, Niger, 2004, supported by a British Academy Small Research Grant.





# The 1970s

The British Academy's ability to support the research of individual humanities scholars through 'small grants' was boosted during this decade by the receipt of significant additional funding from the University Grants Committee. And more of the Academy's long-term collaborative research endeavours began to produce their first outputs. These included editions of historical source material (such as the important 17th-century diary of Ralph Josselin), and illustrated catalogues of the sculpture of Roman Britain and of medieval stained glass.

The Academy also sought to extend its disciplinary coverage of the social sciences: the Keynes Lectures in Economics began in 1971; and there was a new lecture series for leading figures in social anthropology.

But the major focus of the decade was the development of its international research links. To its network of international research institutes were added a British Institute of Aghan Studies (in Kabul) and a British Institute in South-East Asia (in Singapore). (Tragically, Neville Williams, the first Secretary of the British Academy to be a full-time salaried employee rather than a Fellow, would die of a heart attack in 1977 on a visit to the British Institute in Eastern Africa, in Nairobi.)

Additional public and private resource (including from the Leverhulme Trust) made it possible for the Academy to support individual British scholars to travel abroad, and foreign scholars to be invited to undertake research in the UK.

But, with the Cold War still in progress, the improving of academic links with countries in East Europe was the most important aspect of the British Academy's international activities. This was achieved through exchange agreements with the academies of those countries: by the end of the decade, agreements were in place with Hungary, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Romania, the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and East Germany. Geoffrey Dickens, the Academy's Foreign Secretary 1969-79, considered it vital that Eastern bloc academics should not be left isolated from Western thought, and he visited nearly all these countries during his period of office – a level of activity which his Academy obituarist described as 'on a par with royalty or the Pope'.

At a time when business could only be conducted by letter or telegram, these East-West arrangements were slow. And there would inevitably be problems and difficulties, particularly in the relations with the Soviet Academy of Sciences: it took a while for those on the British side to understand the way Soviet bureaucracy worked. Indeed, at the very end of the decade the exchange agreement with the Soviet Academy was effectively suspended, because Moscow had declined to receive two scholars put forward by the British Academy.

That wasn't the only disruption to the British Academy's international activity in 1979. The Iranian Revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan curtailed the work of the British Institutes in Tehran and Kabul.

But, on a positive note, the British Academy's first delegation to China in 1979 opened the way for an important exchange agreement to be signed with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

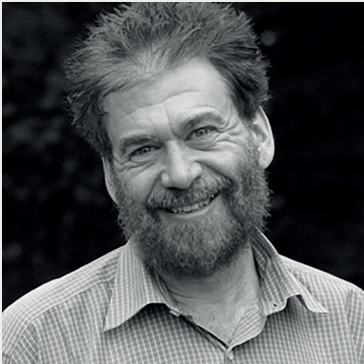


Top Left: In 1972 the British Academy published a catalogue of the stained glass of King's College Chapel, Cambridge.

Left: A British Academy delegation to China in 1979 opened up new channels of academic communication.

## FEATURE

# The British Academy's International Engagement



## Professor Simon Goldhill

*the British Academy's Foreign Secretary & Vice-President, discusses the important role of the Academy's International Engagement*

Much has changed in how the British Academy engages internationally since the 1970s, with the support for international research having significantly expanded in the last decade. In addition, the forms of research we support are now far more diverse. The Academy offers a range of individual fellowships and collaborative research projects, with a particular focus on working generationally through capacity building and supporting equitable partnership.

A major aim in providing these opportunities has been to promote the ability of the humanities and social sciences to lead in international debates. In recent years, we have focused on the UK's withdrawal from the EU, aiming to ensure continued European research collaboration through EU Framework Programmes, as well as addressing the issues this all raises within these islands. And in the last couple of years, the Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the value of international co-operation in tackling challenges such as vaccine engagement.

International co-operation is key to tackling shared global challenges. The British Academy has significantly advanced its support for global challenges research in the last decade, especially supporting collaborative research with partners in the Global South, such as on early childhood, urbanisation, heritage, dignity, learning in crises, nature, risk and resilience, and youth. A key aspect of this has been developing the Academy's ability to engage with major international policy issues.

An example of this was our focus on COP26 hosted in Glasgow in 2021 and our ongoing work on 'Just Transitions'.

The British Academy's approach to international engagement is built on providing significant opportunities for early career researchers. Our Writing Workshops enable them to network with their peers and to receive support and mentoring to develop their careers. Our International Fellowships ensure they can come to the UK with the aim of fostering long-term international collaborations. And our Knowledge Frontiers Symposia provide unique cross-disciplinary environments so they can forge international partnerships.

The 1970s illustrate the focus of the British Academy on East-West relations. With the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the feeling of coming full circle is clear. Equally clear is the value of long-term and historical perspectives on issues such as state fragility and violence. The Academy is once again focused on supporting researchers at risk, something that had been a concern in the 1930s. Critical thinking, open debate and internationalism are increasingly under attack. It is now more important than ever that the Academy remains a beacon for the ideals which it has staunchly defended for the last 12 decades. Above all, we strive to ensure that the value of the humanities and social sciences is recognised and used to build a better world, and we will continue to support excellent research and research collaboration internationally.

Under the British Academy's Cities & Infrastructure programme, Philip Rode (London School of Economics) has led research on the governance of urban infrastructures interfaces in Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa in Ethiopia. Photo: Charlie Rosser Photography.





# The 1980s

The decade began with the most infamous episode in the British Academy's history. After the eminent art historian Anthony Blunt had been exposed as a former Soviet spy in November 1979, over the following months the Fellowship of the British Academy divided deeply – and very publicly in the pages of the national press – over whether it should expel Blunt as one of its members. The Annual General Meeting in July 1980 voted to take no action, but Blunt felt obliged to resign shortly afterwards; five other Fellows on both sides of the argument resigned in indignant protest as events unfolded.

Despite this embarrassing start, the decade would be one of growth and development for the Academy. It had long outgrown its cramped quarters in Burlington House, and at the end of 1982 it moved into new premises in Cornwall Terrace, overlooking Regent's Park – formally inaugurated by the Queen in July 1983.

And there were significant developments in respect of the Academy's role as a funding agency. Time for research is one of the most highly prized commodities for established academics. In 1981 the Academy started offering Research Readerships to allow researchers in universities to devote themselves to investigating a field where they could make real progress. These were complemented in 1989 by Senior Research Fellowships (funded by the Leverhulme Trust); and discussions were in hand to set up a scheme of Research Professorships (to be funded by the Wolfson Foundation).

But it was at the other end of the academic ladder that the Academy became engaged even more strikingly. It was invited by the Department of Education and Science to take over the administration of its scheme for Postgraduate Studentships in the Humanities. The Academy felt somewhat bounced into accepting, but did formally take on the role in 1984, acquiring with it extra staff in an office in Stanmore. As the President, Owen Chadwick, observed: 'the development continued a trend visible over recent years by which the Academy was drawn increasingly into the ambit of government; on the other hand the absence of a research council for the humanities and the importance of maintaining the Academy's responsibility for them made this inevitable.'

The Academy also became involved in assessing applications under the University Grants Committee's initiative to introduce more university posts at a junior level (the 'New Blood' scheme), which ran 1983-85. In 1985 the President, Randolph Quirk, wrote to the Secretary of State for Education and Science to request funding for a regular programme of Postdoctoral Fellowships in the humanities and social sciences. Launched in 1986, this remains a flagship scheme, enabling early career researchers to pursue, over three years, a piece of research that will strengthen their prospects of securing permanent posts. Over 1300 awards have been made to date. Two-thirds of former British Academy Postdoctoral Fellows now hold permanent academic posts, and a quarter of all alumni are professors. Indeed, 17 of those whose early academic careers were helped with this award have subsequently achieved the distinction of being elected as Fellows of the British Academy.

In spite of these developments, at the end of the decade there remained concerns that, without a proper Research Council of its own, funding for humanities research was at a disadvantage compared to other disciplines, and in 1989 the Academy set up a working party to investigate options to put to government.



Top Left: Randolph Quirk, President of the British Academy 1985-89, secured government funding for a new scheme of Postdoctoral Fellowships.

Left: The President of the British Academy, Owen Chadwick, escorts the Queen and Prince Philip as they leave the British Academy's new premises at 20-21 Cornwall Terrace NW1.

## FEATURE

# British Academy Postdoctoral Fellowships



## Andrew Hadfield

*Professor of English at the University of Sussex, who was elected to be a Fellow of the British Academy in 2021, discusses the transformative importance of the Postdoctoral Fellowship that he began in 1989*

It was my external examiner, John Pitcher, who told me about a new postdoctoral scheme sponsored by the British Academy and said he would give me a good reference if I applied. I was already incredibly grateful to the Academy, having benefited from the Postgraduate Studentships scheme that it began administering earlier in the 1980s – so I tried my luck.

Getting the Postdoctoral Fellowship award letter was one of my best days. I was living at home with my parents, wife and first daughter, and had spent the year working in a plastics factory and as an EFL teacher, ready to take up a place for teacher training in Sheffield. I had amassed an impressive pile of job rejection notices and assumed that academic life was not for me.

Now, however, I could move back to my alma mater, Leeds, and work on the relationship between literature and national identity in the 16th century. I was excited by the project, which built on my doctoral work on English perceptions of Ireland in the same period. I was eager then, as I still am, to explore the interactions between literary culture and politics, work that was rather less obviously mainstream than it has become now. I was also keen to think about phenomena, such as ideas of national identity, which were all too often assumed to be ‘modern’, and to have emerged with the Enlightenment, but which I suspected had a much longer history. I remember giving a paper in Oxford on Edmund Spenser and national

identity after which I was berated by a young don for my ludicrous, anachronistic interpretation of something that could not have existed as I had claimed.

I published very little during the Postdoctoral Fellowship and was worried that the Academy would cancel it when I filled in rather slender annual reports. But they trusted me to carry out the research, and it was a time in which I read a significant amount, learned how to write, and produced a bit more than half a book that appeared two years later. The fellowship changed my life and prepared me for a career of teaching and research. I have worked on a series of inter-related literary subjects throughout my writing and teaching life – political ideas, Britishness, colonialism, race, class, religion – all of which depend on, in direct and indirect ways, the work I was able to carry out for my thesis and fellowship, both sponsored by the Academy.

In November 1987, the Queen Mother attended a reception at the British Academy to meet Postdoctoral Fellows and Research Readers.





# The 1990s

For 25 years, the British Academy had increasingly been taking on the role of a Humanities Research Council. But there were many who thought that this was not the best way of maximising public funding for humanities research, and that it wasn't in the best interests of the Academy either. Two reports issued early in the decade – one by the British Academy in 1990, one by the British Academy and the ESRC together in 1992 – recommended the establishment of a proper Humanities Research Council. But government was not persuaded. Therefore in 1994 the Academy set up its own Humanities Research Board (HRB) to run most of its publicly resourced research funding schemes.

This administrative move gave the Academy thinking space to reconsider its own role as a learned society. A first step was to review the framework of the Fellowship's disciplinary groupings (Sections) – in particular to increase the representation and prominence of the social sciences within the Academy. As part of this rebalancing, a Section for Anthropology and Geography was added in 1994, and one for Psychology in 1999.

The Academy also sought to refresh its role as a forum for academic communication. A series of *conversazioni* was introduced to enable Fellows to meet and discuss issues of current interest. There were additions to the lecture programme, including an annual keynote lecture. And at the end of the decade there were the first examples of what would blossom into a programme of topical public events. A major development was the initiation of a programme of academic conferences, beginning with an event in 1992 to mark the 500th anniversary of Columbus's 'discovery' of the New World. These conferences remain a key activity, and papers from them are published in the *Proceedings of the British Academy* series.

The year 1998 saw two developments that were crucial for the future of the British Academy. In March it moved into premises at Carlton House Terrace – a new home that would house the growing number of staff, and which would enable the Academy to host its new ambitious events programmes.

And in the summer of 1998, the British Academy and the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) finalised an agreement by which they would pool resources and establish an Arts and Humanities Research Board to support research and postgraduate study in the arts and humanities – with the Academy contributing nearly £15 million for the postgraduate schemes. (This Board would subsequently become a fully constituted Arts and Humanities Research Council.)

In a new recognition of the importance of 'outreach' to the public, the first issue of a general readership magazine, the *British Academy Review*, appeared in 1999. Newly freed from an obligation to focus disproportionately on humanities activities, and with a splendid home in which to fulfil its ambitions, the British Academy could proclaim with confidence on the front cover of that magazine that it was now truly 'the national academy for the humanities and social sciences'.



Top Left: The *Proceedings of the British Academy* series publishes papers from the Academy's programme of conferences.

Left: The British Academy moved into its new home at 10-11 Carlton House Terrace in March 1998.

## FEATURE

# British Academy events



## Professor Rana Mitter

*the British Academy's Vice-President for Public Engagement, discusses the wide range of events supported by the Academy*

The British Academy held its first Summer Showcase at 10-11 Carlton House Terrace in June 2018. Designed to complement the Royal Society's long-standing Summer Science Exhibition and the Royal Academy's Summer Exhibition, the free two-day festival brings to life research from the humanities and social sciences in creative and innovative ways. Through a competitive process, 12-15 researchers are selected to develop exhibits about their work that will enable meaningful engagement with the general public. Related talks and performances are programmed throughout. Almost 2000 people have visited the Showcase over the two days, including several hundred 14+ school and college pupils on a day tailored for them. After a pivot online during Covid, we are delighted to be once more hosting a live Showcase on 17-18 June 2022.

In many ways, the Showcase has been the culmination of a growing programme of events aimed at the public. A particular development during the Presidency of Sir David Cannadine (2017-21) was the expansion of our relationships with the major festivals in the UK, and beyond – including the Jaipur Literary Festival. The regionalising of our events programme has also continued, with the British Academy taking its historic programme of lectures on the road, in partnership with universities across the UK. Likewise, while a number of meetings continue to be held in our own building, the British Academy Conference scheme also funds those held at venues outside of London.

And as a founding partner of the Being Human festival, we support hundreds of events each year all around the country.

The pandemic brought an abrupt halt to our programme of 'in-person' events, but we were quick to adapt – expanding our digital offerings to showcase the ideas of our disciplines and the people behind them. World-leading academics swapped the lectern for the virtual stage, taking part in a new series of 10-minute talks for YouTube, and in other discussions via Zoom. We held online events with organisations such as the British Museum. And the London Review Bookshop became a partner for our British Academy Book Prize in bringing together the shortlisted authors in an online event to talk about their books, all within the theme of global cultural understanding.

With building work beginning in our home at Carlton House Terrace to create event spaces with built-in digital capabilities, the future development of the British Academy's events programme – whether in-person, online or both – is full of exciting potential.

Professor Preti Taneja gave a British Academy Lecture at the University of Leeds in May 2022. Photo: Suki Dhandu.





# The 2000s

An opportunity to showcase the vitality of UK humanities and social sciences at the start of a new millennium was presented early in the decade by the occasion of the British Academy's centenary in 2002. In addition to a celebratory conference, there were nine Centenary Lectures held in universities across the UK. A series of Centenary Monographs considered the state of different disciplines, either reflecting on developments in scholarship in the 20th century, or looking forward to the challenges of the 21st. And a major seven-year Centenary Research Project was launched, combining approaches from archaeology and psychology to investigate the social and cognitive evolution of humans.

More generally, the British Academy was developing its public engagement activities. A prize was initiated to champion academic books that contributed to the understanding of both specialists and non-specialists. And there were new programmes of public events and publications. For example, in 2004, Margaret Atwood appeared at the Academy 'in conversation'; and a public debate and follow-up publication discussed the Hutton and Butler reports on the Iraq War.

In a significant sign of change, Baroness Onora O'Neill became the first female President of the British Academy in 2005. During her period of office, the Academy articulated a new mission statement and strategic objectives, and there were structural reforms aimed at better equipping the Academy's administration to deliver on these priorities.

As part of its refreshed vision, the British Academy more clearly embraced its leadership role in representing the interests of the humanities and social sciences. It increasingly engaged in policy issues related to the general health of the disciplines, producing reports on graduate studies, on the development of 'e-resources' for academics, on copyright and intellectual property, on peer review, and on the formal assessment of research at a national level. A particular focus of concern was the state of foreign language learning in the UK; the Academy's 2009 position paper *Language Matters* warned that a lack of language skills would damage the UK's ability to conduct research of the highest international calibre, and it urged an increase in foreign language teaching in schools and universities – sadly a plea that the Academy has had to repeat regularly since then.

Again as part of this leadership role, the British Academy championed arguments demonstrating the public value of investment in the humanities and social sciences. A 2004 report explained the contribution made by the Academy's disciplines to all aspects of the nation's wealth – or 'that full complement of riches', to use Adam Smith's expression – including providing 'the high level skills required to sustain and enrich an increasingly knowledge-based society and economy'. And the 2008 report *Punching our weight* expressed the Academy's 'serious concerns that policy makers are not realising the full potential of the contributions that humanities and social science research can make to public policy making'.

As evidence of its ambition to engage with public policy issues, in 2009 the Academy convened a forum of senior figures to answer the Queen's question – if circumstances leading up to the global financial crisis had been so serious, why hadn't anyone noticed? – and it established a Policy Centre to consider a broad range of public interest matters in the following decade.



Top Left: The British Academy celebrated its centenary in 2002.

Left: Baroness Onora O'Neill, President 2005-09, gave the British Academy new strategic direction.  
From UK Parliament 2022, licensed under CC BY 3.0



## FEATURE

# The British Academy's Research and HE Policy work



## Professor Simon Swain

*the British Academy's Vice-President for Research and Higher Education Policy, discusses the Academy's engagement with policy issues relating to the health of its disciplines.*

In perhaps surprising parallels with the 2000s, the British Academy again approaches a significant anniversary of its tenure under the leadership of a female President, while also overseeing a review of its strategic objectives. We continue in our leadership role, representing the interests of the humanities and social sciences, and 'speaking up' for our disciplines remains a core mission for the Higher Education and Skills team.

The Academy's leadership in representing what we now call the 'SHAPE' disciplines – Social Sciences, Humanities and the Arts for People and the Economy – has matured since the 2000s. We now operate extensive and collaborative networks within our disciplines, which bring together distinct voices to share information and tackle challenges. Our Strategic Forums for Social Science and for the Humanities, our Learned Societies and Subject Association Network, the Higher Education Development Policy Group, an extensive collection of Languages groups, and, until recently, our Skills Steering Group, are all vehicles which offer valued support and sustain the Academy's ability to engage in complex debates with the very best evidence.

As in the 2000s, our Fellows and policy team are increasingly engaged in debates around the health and value of the disciplines. The last two decades have seen significant shifts in debates and ideologies relating to higher education: from ambitions for significant increases

in student numbers under New Labour, to the concerted focus on quality provision and life-long access under successive Conservative governments. Both have impacted upon the SHAPE disciplines, offering new opportunities and presenting different challenges. This is why now, as in the 2000s, we concern ourselves with the health of our constituent disciplines.

Through our Higher Education policy work, the Academy is proactively equipping policymakers, the UK's disciplinary communities and the interested public, with a strong understanding of the shifts, opportunities and challenges faced by our disciplines. Our SHAPE Observatory webpage brings together mapping reports, subject deep dives, and briefings to provide insight into emerging trends.

We use this evidence, not to look at past events and ask what – if anything – was known in advance, but to look forwards and build a vision for the future of SHAPE teaching and research. We are working towards a joined-up, holistic approach which is coherent across the education and research system, and which recognises the societal, cultural and monetary value of SHAPE disciplines to people, the economy and the environment.

The British Academy champions the health of its disciplines in a changing higher education landscape.



L&amp;QS

## The 2010s

A shift in government spending priorities in 2010 threatened the Academy's ability to offer small-scale funding for research. Individual Fellows of the British Academy donated generously, and the President, Sir Adam Roberts, cycled from Land's End to John o'Groats to raise money for the Academy. Fortunately, the Leverhulme Trust stepped in to keep alive the popular Small Research Grants scheme. And further generosity from the Wolfson Foundation enabled the Academy to expand into previously unoccupied spaces in No. 11 Carlton House Terrace, including a lecture auditorium inaugurated in March 2011.

'To understand challenges which include an ageing population, migration, sustaining the environment and managing climate change, we require conceptual clarity and impartial, evidence-based research and analysis, together with open-mindedness and creativity in exploring new ideas.' That is how Lord Nicholas Stern (President of the British Academy 2013-17) introduced the 2014 report *Prospering Wisely: How the humanities and social sciences enrich our lives*, and in this decade the Academy established a strong role in bringing academic expertise to bear on matters of public policy. Issues such as ageing and immigration were addressed in a series of British Academy Debates held across the country. A major programme investigated the purpose of business and its role in society; and there was research into the impact of artificial intelligence on the future of work. And to help address such challenges, the Academy advocated better numeracy and statistical skills for both academics and the wider population.

The British Academy also sought to shed light on the considerable constitutional upheavals of the decade. Reports published in 2010 looked at the electoral system and constituency boundaries. *Enlightening the Constitutional Debate* provided important context in the lead up to the 2014 Scottish independence referendum. Another policy programme considered questions about England's governance, institutions and identity. And a series of briefings explored the implications for Northern Ireland of the UK's withdrawal from the European Union.

With generous funding from the government's Global Challenges Research Fund and from the Department for International Development, the British Academy supported research into challenges with worldwide dimensions – with outputs from them published in the new 'open access' *Journal of the British Academy*. One programme promoted measures to tackle the problems of modern slavery and child labour. Another looked at creating sustainable and resilient cities in developing countries. And another programme investigated policies for early childhood development that could transform the life chances of children. The importance of this global perspective was reflected in the creation of a new prize in Global Cultural Understanding, established in 2013 in partnership with Professor Nayef Al-Rodhan.

For all this achievement at the end of the British Academy's 12th decade, there remained a recognition that issues of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) within the institution would benefit from further attention and improvement. In late 2019, the Academy commissioned a review into these EDI considerations, to ensure that it could continue to fulfil its crucial role as the national academy for the humanities and social sciences with renewed vigour and confidence.



Top Left: Additional government funding supported a British Academy programme promoting Languages and Quantitative Skills.

Left: The British Academy's 'Future of the Corporation' programme has defined important principles for 'purposeful business'.

## FEATURE

# Diversity at the British Academy



## Professor Aditi Lahiri and Professor Conor Gearty

*the British Academy's Vice-Presidents for Humanities and Social Sciences respectively, explain how the Academy is addressing issues of equality, diversity and inclusion*



The 2010s saw the British Academy increasingly focus on issues of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI). To put it mildly, there was ground to make-up: as late as 2012, the percentage of female newly elected Fellows was only 16% of the total, far below the benchmark proportion of women professors in the humanities and social sciences in the UK. There had been no women Presidents of the Academy until Baroness O'Neill in 2005. Around this time, the Academy began taking serious steps to improve inclusivity and representation within the Fellowship, in terms not only of protected characteristics but also institutional and disciplinary diversity. Whilst some aspects of diversity in the Fellowship did greatly improve over the 2010s (in 2019, 50% of newly elected Fellows were women), the Academy was the first to recognise that there was still some way to go.

In this period the Academy established two working groups – a Fellows' Diversity Working Group (chaired by Professor Catriona Seth FBA) and a Staff Diversity Working Group. These continue to work side-by-side to examine current practices and policies related to EDI and to identify ways forward. The working groups commissioned an independent review which looked at each of the Academy's three roles: an independent fellowship of world-leading scholars and researchers; a funding body that supports new research, national and internationally; and a forum for debate and engagement – a voice that champions the humanities and social

sciences. The review was completed in 2020.

A series of EDI workstreams were also established, focusing on each area of the Academy's work. A new people strategy has focused on our policies and practices as an employer, introducing a series of family-friendly policies and a new recruitment platform to support more equitable and unbiased hiring practices. We have also invested in our building and public-facing communications to ensure they are accessible and inclusive. In addition, we have continued to monitor and support diversity among our funded researchers, and supported initiatives aimed at promoting participation in our disciplines across diverse audiences, both in the UK and internationally.

This new focus on diversity was written into the strategic framework of 2013 and has also featured as a core value in the 2018-22 Strategic Plan. The British Academy recognises that a more diverse Fellowship means a more vibrant and intellectually challenging environment, bringing with it new ideas, new areas of research, and innovative approaches. As the Academy develops its new strategic objectives for the 2020s, it is certain that EDI will remain at the heart of its ambitions.

The philosopher Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1939, then recognised again with an Honorary Fellowship when he became President of India in 1962.



## FEATURE

# The British Academy now



**Hetan Shah**

*Chief Executive of the British Academy*

Looking back over the last 12 decades, the British Academy has changed in a variety of ways, but the golden thread has been the promotion of the humanities and social sciences for public benefit and understanding. The way in which the Academy has interpreted this mission and role has shifted over time in light of wider circumstances and need. The 2020s herald an Academy that is looking at new ways to showcase the value of our disciplines, to engage more widely, to strengthen our impact, with our Fellows at the heart of our work. With Covid-19 marking its start, this decade has already shown the need for the humanities and social sciences – with psychologists, historians, anthropologists, economists and more, all involved in shaping the response to the pandemic.

To build greater understanding of the value of our disciplines, the British Academy has helped create the notion of ‘SHAPE’ – the Social Sciences, Humanities and the Arts for People and the Economy – to sit alongside the term STEM and to show that we need insights from all disciplines to build a prosperous and sustainable world. The inclusion of the ‘arts’ in SHAPE signifies our intention to build a stronger relationship with the cultural and creative sectors.

This is part of a drive to open up and engage with a wider range of partners, audiences and stakeholders. Our building transformation project is designed to create spaces to convene leaders from research, government, civil society, business and the media to come together to

discuss the big issues of the day. Our new Early-Career Research Network is a way for researchers to belong to the Academy (regardless of whether they are funded by us) and for us to support the next generation. We will also be building on all we learnt through the pandemic to engage digitally with a global public audience.

The British Academy is focused on strengthening our impact on the world. We have been leading projects on a wide range of topics including the long-term societal impacts of the pandemic, the future of business, work on creating a ‘just transition’ to sustainability, vaccine hesitancy and engagement, and on how artificial intelligence and data need to be governed.

One thing that is constant is that the Fellowship guides all of the work of the British Academy. In the 2020s we will continue to evolve the ways in which we can engage our Fellows – including through digital means – to help us continue to mobilise the humanities and social sciences to understand the world and shape a brighter future.



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# How to support the British Academy

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For 120 years the British Academy has been bringing together the best minds in the humanities and social sciences – to support talented researchers, to advise government and to sharpen the quality of public discourse.

From artificial intelligence to climate change, from building prosperity to improving well-being – today’s complex challenges can only be resolved through deeper understanding of people, cultures and societies.

Supporting the humanities and social sciences at the heart of social, economic and cultural life is more important than ever. We are seeking to put our intellectual capital, interdisciplinary approach and convening power to work – inspiring, enhancing and connecting great ideas to shape a brighter world for the benefit of all.

Our vision is to mobilise the knowledge and insights of the disciplines we champion to help make sense of our world and to shape a better future.

In pursuit of this vision, as mentioned on page 7, we have embarked on an ambitious project – transforming the lower ground floors of our home at Carlton House Terrace into state of the art digitally enabled event spaces. These new spaces will not only vastly improve the quality of our online and hybrid events, but enable us to engage with the global research community and public audiences in a way that has not previously been possible.

As a charity, the British Academy receives valuable philanthropic, sponsorship and *pro bono* support from partners in the UK and internationally. If you believe that the humanities and social sciences are crucial to understanding the challenges facing society today, please consider making a gift online at: [thebritishacademy.ac.uk/support-us/make-a-gift](https://thebritishacademy.ac.uk/support-us/make-a-gift)

If you would like to talk to us about supporting our work, or if you are thinking of leaving a gift in your will to the Academy, please contact Jennifer Hawton, Individual Giving and Legacy Manager, at [j.hawton@thebritishacademy.ac.uk](mailto:j.hawton@thebritishacademy.ac.uk) or on 020 7969 5258.



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The British Academy is the UK's national academy for the humanities and social sciences. We mobilise these disciplines to understand the world and shape a brighter future. From artificial intelligence to climate change, from building prosperity to improving well-being – today's complex challenges can only be resolved by deepening our insight into people, cultures and societies. We invest in researchers and projects across the UK and overseas, engage the public with fresh thinking and debates, and bring together scholars, government, business and civil society to influence policy for the benefit of everyone.

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